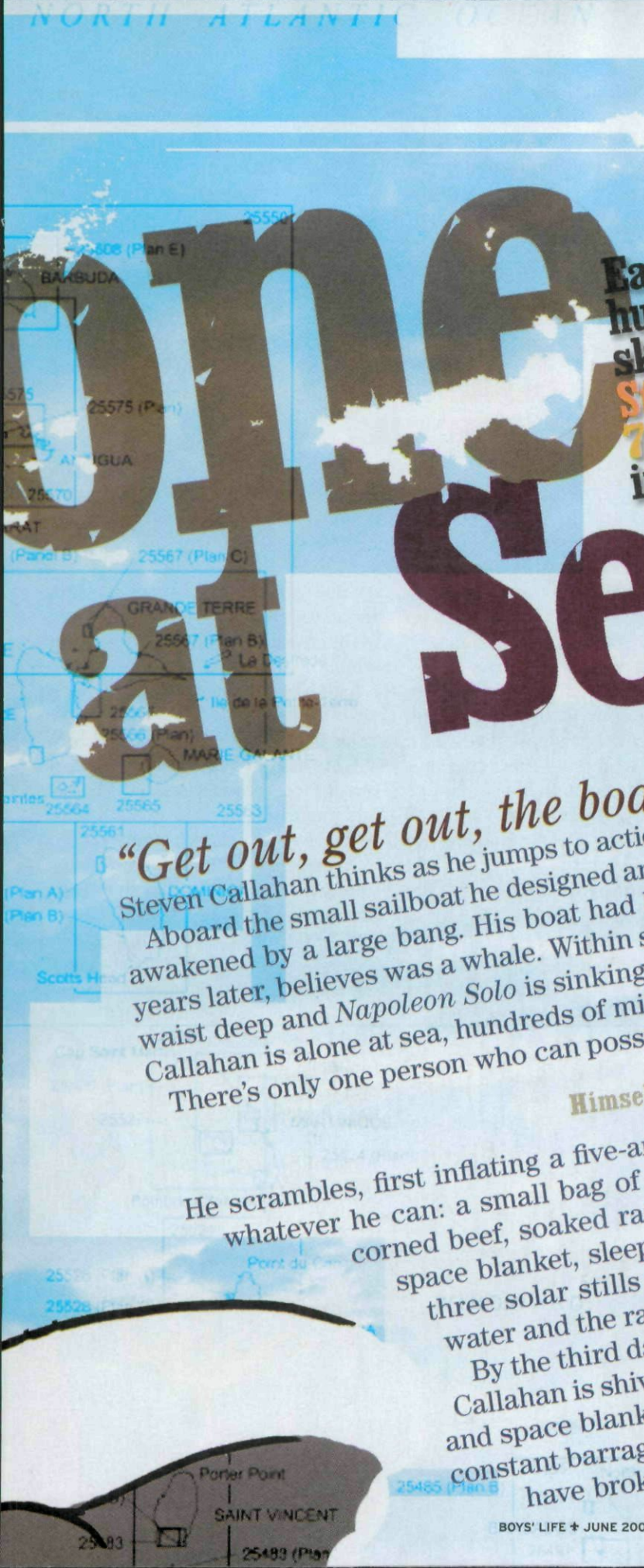


Illustrations by Eric Gillinger



Eating raw fish, avoiding hungry sharks and using skills learned in Scouting, **Steven Callahan** survives 76 harrowing days adrift in the Atlantic.

By Stephen Jermanok

"Get out, get out, the boat's going down!"

Steven Callahan thinks as he jumps to action in the darkness of the night. Aboard the small sailboat he designed and built, Callahan has just been awakened by a large bang. His boat had been rammed by what he now, years later, believes was a whale. Within seconds, the water in the boat is waist deep and *Napoleon Solo* is sinking. Eight days out on the Atlantic, Callahan is alone at sea, hundreds of miles from the nearest land. There's only one person who can possibly save Steven Callahan.

Himself.

He scrambles, first inflating a five-and-a-half-foot raft. Then he grabs whatever he can: a small bag of food with peanuts, baked beans, corned beef, soaked raisins, eight pints of fresh water, a space blanket, sleeping bag, flares, a short spear gun, three solar stills for distilling salt water into fresh water and the raft air pump.

By the third day, bathed by frigid wave after wave, Callahan is shivering and sore. His wet sleeping bag and space blanket are meager protection against the constant barrage of cold seawater. Hundreds of boils have broken out on his skin, and the saltwater burns each new raw cut.

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Thus, the voyage began for Callahan atop the raft he would jokingly refer to as Rubber Ducky.

Starting on Jan. 29, 1982, Callahan would spend a mind-boggling 76 days aboard a vessel the size of an out-house. He would fend off scorching mid-day sun, cold ocean temperatures, starvation, dehydration, shark attacks and the disappointment of watching nine ships pass without their occupants having the slightest idea he was there.

Deserted at sea, Callahan was finally spotted off the coast of the Caribbean island Guadeloupe by a group of fishermen.

His true tale of survival atop the Atlantic would become a best-selling book, "Adrift." Both terrifying and profoundly inspirational, the story shows how one man fought to survive against insurmountable odds.

You Just Never Know

"Be Prepared" is the Scout motto we all live by. Sometimes, though, we may take it for granted.

Nature's Mysteries

In many ways, the book "Adrift" is about the magic and mystery of the natural world.

This is especially true with regards to the dorado (also called "mahi-mahi" and "dolphin fish") that swam along Callahan for much of his journey.

Dorado are known for seeking out objects floating on the surface, such as the seaweed Sargasso, driftwood and the occasional raft.

Within days of Callahan being forced into his raft, the dorado had somehow gauged the range of his spear gun — and kept a safe distance.

Once his spear gun broke, however, and the dorado swam closer, Callahan was able to surprise the fish with his makeshift knife — and strike enough of them to eat...and to survive.

"It was like they were giving me their life so I could eat," says the bewildered sailor.

"There's no easy explanation."

Not Steven Callahan.

"Things are going well, but you never know what can happen next," he says. "You might fall down and break your leg. Or your boat can sink in the middle of the ocean. You have to pay

"Part of me was really scared, saying, 'You're gonna die, you're gonna die.'"
Callahan says. "There's also another voice in your head that yells, 'Stand up, get the spear, aim!'"

attention and be ready for anything."

Growing up in Dover, Mass., Callahan got his first taste of the wilderness on Scouting trips to Vermont and New Hampshire. He learned to canoe down rivers and backpack up the peaks of the White Mountains.

When Callahan was 11, his Scoutmaster, Arthur Adams, invited him to serve as crew day-sailing on the nearby Atlantic Ocean. Callahan accepted, and was immediately hooked on the oceanic life.

"Sailing involves so much," Callahan says. "From gauging the wind to studying the charts and the stars, to learning the history and the craftsmanship of boat building. I was always curious about life, and this tied it all together."

Adams became Callahan's mentor. He taught him to choose the destination and to take the helm, preparing him to sail on his own.

"By the time I reached 16," Callahan says, "I would call him up and he'd tell me to take the boat out myself."

And it wasn't long before Callahan was building his own craft and competing with other sailors.

Fish or Biscuits?

Competition—in this case, a race across the Atlantic—brings Callahan to that fateful day in 1982.

Aboard Rubber Ducky, his food quickly runs out and his body slowly deteriorates because of lack of nutrients.

He catches fish using a spear gun, which he often has to repair, lashing it together and creating makeshift tips with knife blades, then thrusting at game in the water for his sustenance.

Only two of the three stills work, but he manages to remove the salt and impurities to make enough water to survive—about two cups a day.

All the while he dreams of his family and the smell of fresh biscuits around a fire.

"That dream was irritating, because I was living off raw fish and barnacles," Callahan says. "But it was a good reminder that if I could just hang on, I'd get to taste biscuits again."

Keep Pushing On

Adrift, Callahan knows it would be pure luck if ships were to see his

small raft in the vast ocean. Yet he tries desperately to get their attention. He lights flares, but even ships that seem close just slide by him.

Worse are the occasional middle-of-the-night wake-up calls from a hungry shark.

"Part of me was really scared, saying, 'You're gonna die, you're gonna die,'" Callahan says. "There's also another voice in your head that yells, 'Stand up, get the spear, aim!' When you're in a survival situation, going through constant crisis, you become very focused on what you need to do."

On his 43rd day at sea, a large fish breaks the spear and rams it against the bottom tube of the raft.

Now he has a gaping hole.

Callahan does his best to patch the leak and, remarkably, lasts more than a month more on the water.

When he finally reaches land on April 21, 1982, Callahan has lost 44 pounds and has very little energy.

Yet, he is alive.

Back to the Sea

"The whole world was brand new again," he says, "from the smells to the colors, everything."

Ten days later, he would be back on a sailboat, gradually making his way home to America.

Callahan has since crossed the Atlantic six times and the Pacific once, but never again solo.

Now in his 50's, he lives on the coast of Maine, having spent the past two years sailing coastal Australia with his wife, Kathy.

What's left of Rubber Ducky is at the Peabody Essex Museum at Salem, Mass. His sailboat houses a folding dinghy that Callahan has created. A canopy sits over the boat to protect sailors from the sun. More important, a sail can be hoisted so the dinghy can go against the wind and not drift aimlessly.

"Using this, I could have reached the Cape Verde Islands off Africa in 14 days, not two and a half months," he notes.

That's a lot less raw fish to swallow.✦

Scouting Skills: Lifesavers

The skills Steven Callahan learned as a Boy Scout served him well on the water.

The ability to read a topographical map while hiking would come in handy when viewing navigational charts. The use of ropes and tying knots is extremely important for the seafaring life.

Callahan's fondest memory of his Scouting years comes from climbing the second largest peak in New England, 5,774-foot Mount Adams, in mid-February.

"The ascent was grueling," says Callahan, adding that "the most fulfilling things in life aren't always fun. But at the end, you had these spectacular views."



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